

PATENT APPLICATION

SLIPCOVERS FOR SUPPORT PILLOWS

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SLIPCOVERS FOR SUPPORT PILLOWS

CROSS REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 **[0001]** This application is a continuation in part application and claims the benefit of
copending U.S. Application No. 10/638,058, filed August 7, 2003, which is a continuation
application of U.S. Application No. 10/241,504, filed September 10, 2002 (now U.S. Patent
No. 6,625,828), which is a continuation application of U.S. Application No. 09/802,310, filed
March 8, 2001 (now U.S. Patent No. 6,453,493, the complete disclosures of which are herein
10 incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates generally to the field of support pillows, and in particular to
covers for support pillows. More specifically, the invention relates to removable covers for
15 support pillows so that a single support pillow can be modified simply by substituting one
cover with another cover.

[0003] Support pillows have gained widespread acceptance in a variety of applications. For
example, support pillows are now commonly used to support infants and babies in certain
positions. Support pillows are also used to provide back support, to facilitate nursing, to
20 support objection in front of a person, and the like. Such uses are described in, for example,
U.S. Patent Nos. 5,261,134; 5,661,861; 6,038,720; 6,055,687; 6,119,873; and 5,546,620, the
complete disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference.

[0004] Some support pillows are constructed of a filler material that is stuffed into a fabric
shell. This shell may be completely closed, such as with a sewn seam, to prevent the filler
25 material from inadvertently being removed. The fabric shell may be decorated with a variety
of colors and/or patterns.

[0005] This invention is related to covers for these and other types of support pillows so that
the decorative and/or utilitarian functionality of such pillows may to easily be varied.

30 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The invention provides exemplary covers for support pillows and methods for their
use. With such covers, a single support pillow can be modified to have different colors,
designs, textures, or the like as well as different utilitarian functions.

[0007] In one embodiment, the covers are useful with a cushion body having a medial region and two opposing arms that define a generally open well. The cushion body further includes an outer periphery and an inner periphery adjacent the well, with each of the arms terminating in an end. A shell encompasses and in some cases tightly conforms to the cushion body.

5 With such support pillows, the fabric cover may be constructed so that it may be placed over the shell, with the fabric cover generally conforming to the shape of the pillow body. To facilitate placement of the cover over the pillow, the fabric cover includes an opening into which the pillow may be inserted. The opening in some embodiments may be defined by a seam where the fabric is separated. In one aspect, at least one fastener is provided to close
10 the opening once the cover has been placed over the shell. In this way, a support pillow may be modified simply by inserting the pillow into the opening of the cover and then operating the fastener to close the opening.

[0008] The opening may be positioned at a wide variety of locations on the cover. For example, the opening may be located along the outer or inner periphery at the medial region,
15 along the inner periphery on one of the arms, along the outer periphery on one of the arms, across the medial region, along one of the ends, or across one of the arms. In one aspect, the fabric cover may comprise a curved tubular member having two ends, where one of the ends is closed and one of the ends is open to define the opening. Such a cover further includes an end flap to cover the opening, and the fastener is used to couple the end flap to the tubular
20 member.

[0009] In another aspect, the cushion body is constructed of a fill material that is compressed or held within the shell. For example, polymer fibers, beads or other fill materials may be held within the interior. In a further aspect, the shell is constructed of a fabric. In some cases, the cover may have a fabric with different colors, textures and/or patterns on each side.
25 In this way, the cover may be reversed to display the other side of the cover. In other cases, different fabrics may be placed on each side.

[0010] A variety of fasteners may be used to close the opening. For example, the fastener may comprise a zipper, a hook and loop fastener material, ties, buttons, buckles, snaps, hooks or the like. In one optional aspect, at least one peripheral item may be attached to the cover
30 to vary the utility of the pillow. Conveniently, an attachment mechanism may be used to attach the peripheral item to the cover. Merely by way of example, the peripheral item may comprise a toy and the attachment mechanism may comprise a strap or loop. The peripheral item may also comprise toy bars from which toys may be hung above the pillow. As another example, the peripheral item may comprise a head of a figure, such as an animal head. Other

items that may be attached to the cover include handles, pockets, appliqués, ties, blankets, bladders, padding layers, and the like.

[0011] The invention also provides a method for covering a support pillow that is similar to the support pillows described above. The method further utilizes a cover that is formed from a curved tubular member having an open interior. According to the method, a fastener on the cover is operated to form or expose an opening in the tubular member to provide access to the interior. The support pillow is placed into the interior of the cover through the opening and the cover is manipulated so that the cover covers the shell and generally conforms to the shape of the support pillow. The fastener is then operated to close or cover the opening.

[0012] By using such a cover, the fastener may be operated to reform or re-expose the opening, and the cover may be removed from the support pillow. Another cover may then be placed over the support pillow in a similar manner.

[0013] A variety of techniques may be used to form the opening. For example, a zipper may be unzipped, a flap may be removed from the cover, or the like. Other examples of fasteners include buttons, snaps, hooks, ties, a hook and loop fastener material and the like. In another aspect, a peripheral item may be attached to the cover. For example, the peripheral item may comprise a toy or a toy bar that may be attached by use of a strap that is attached to the cover. In a further aspect, the opening may be formed across the medial region, along one of the arms, along one of the ends, along the outer or inner periphery, or the like.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a support pillow having a removable cover according to the invention.

[0015] Fig. 2 is a cross sectional view of the support pillow and cover of Fig. 1.

[0016] Fig. 3 is a top view of an embodiment of a pillow cover according to the invention.

[0017] Fig. 4 is a top view of another embodiment of a pillow cover according to the invention.

[0018] Fig. 5 is a top view of yet another embodiment of a pillow cover according to the invention.

[0019] Fig. 6 is a top of still another embodiment of a pillow cover according to the invention.

[0020] Fig. 7 is a top view of one particular embodiment of a pillow cover according to the invention.

[0021] Fig. 8 is a top view of a further embodiment of a pillow cover according to the invention.

[0022] Fig. 9A is a top view of a pillow cover having an open end according to the invention.

[0023] Fig. 9B illustrates the cover of Fig. 9A with an end flap to cover the opening.

5 [0024] Fig. 10 illustrates a support pillow and cover having straps for attaching items to the cover according to the invention.

[0025] Fig. 11 illustrates a support pillow and cover having an animal head that is attached to the cover according to the invention.

10 [0026] Fig. 12 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a zipper across the medial region.

[0027] Fig. 13 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a zipper along the outer periphery.

[0028] Fig. 14 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a zipper along one of the ends.

15 [0029] Fig. 15 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a zipper along the inner periphery.

[0030] Fig. 16 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having ties along the medial region.

20 [0031] Fig. 17 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having ties along the outer periphery.

[0032] Fig. 18 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having ties along the ends of the arms.

[0033] Fig. 19 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having ties along the inner periphery.

25 [0034] Fig. 20 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buttons along the medial region.

[0035] Fig. 21 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buttons along the outer periphery.

30 [0036] Fig. 22 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buttons along the ends of the arms.

[0037] Fig. 23 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buttons along the inner periphery.

[0038] Fig. 24 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buckles along the medial region.

- [0039] Fig. 25 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buckles along the outer periphery.
- [0040] Fig. 26 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buckles along the ends of the arms.
- 5 [0041] Fig. 27 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having buckles along the inner periphery.
- [0042] Fig. 28 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a flap with an optional hook and loop fastener material along the medial region.
- 10 [0043] Fig. 29 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having flap with an optional hook and loop fastener material along the outer periphery.
- [0044] Fig. 30 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having flap with an optional hook and loop fastener material along the
- 15 ends of the arms.
- [0045] Fig. 31 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having flap with an optional hook and loop fastener material along the inner periphery.
- [0046] Fig. 32 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with
- 20 the cover having snaps along the medial region.
- [0047] Fig. 33 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having snaps along the outer periphery.
- [0048] Fig. 34 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having snaps along the ends of the arms.
- 25 [0049] Fig. 35 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having snaps along the inner periphery.
- [0050] Fig. 36 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having hooks along the medial region.
- [0051] Fig. 37 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support
- 30 pillow, with the cover having hooks along the outer periphery.
- [0052] Fig. 38 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having hooks along the ends of the arms.
- [0053] Fig. 39 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having hooks along the inner periphery.

- [0054] Fig. 40 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a reversible cover.
- [0055] Fig. 41 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a handle along the outer periphery at the medial region.
- [0056] Fig. 42 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a handle along the outer periphery along one of the arms.
- [0057] Fig. 43 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a handle diagonally positioned along the medial region.
- [0058] Fig. 44 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a handle along one of the arms.
- [0059] Fig. 45 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having pockets along the outer periphery at the medial region.
- [0060] Fig. 46 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having pockets along the face of the medial region.
- [0061] Fig. 47 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having pockets along the outer periphery at the medial region.
- [0062] Fig. 48 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having pockets on the medial region and the arms.
- [0063] Fig. 49 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having attachments along the outer periphery that couple toys to the cover.
- [0064] Fig. 50 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with pockets along the outer periphery that couple toy bars to the cover.
- [0065] Fig. 51 is a perspective view of another embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having attachments along the outer periphery that couple toy bars to the cover.
- [0066] Fig. 52 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having one arrangement of appliqués.
- [0067] Fig. 53 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having another arrangement of appliqués.
- [0068] Fig. 54 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a further arrangement of appliqués.
- [0069] Fig. 55 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having still a further arrangement of appliqués.
- [0070] Fig. 56 is a perspective view of a cover having an animal head.

[0071] Fig. 57 is a perspective view of a cover in the shape of an animal.

[0072] Fig. 58 is a front perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having ties at the ends of the arms.

[0073] Fig. 59 is a front perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a harness.

[0074] Fig. 60 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a blanket coupled thereto.

[0075] Fig. 61 is a rear perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having an internal pocket for holding a padding layer.

[0076] Fig. 62 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, and an inflatable bladder between the cover and the pillow.

[0077] Fig. 63 is a cross-sectional view of the pillow and cover of Fig. 62 taken along lines 62-62.

[0078] Fig. 64 is a top view of one embodiment of a cover that covers a support pillow, with the cover having a reversible pocket at one end for closing the cover over the pillow.

[0079] Fig. 65 is a bottom view of the pillow and cover of Fig. 64.

[0080] Fig. 66 illustrates the pillow and cover of Fig. 65 once the pocket has been inverted and placed over the end of the pillow.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

[0081] The invention provides various covers for support pillows. The covers of the invention may be used with a wide variety of support pillows, some of which may have a generally resilient cushion body. The cushion body may be constructed in a variety of ways and of a variety of materials. One way is to stuff a fill material into a flexible shell, such as a fabric tube. Types of fill materials that may be used include fibers, balls, seeds, foamed materials, elastomers and the like. Some examples of such support pillows are described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,261,134; 5,661,861; 6,038,720; 6,055,687; 6,119,873; and 5,546,620, incorporated herein by reference. Other types of cushion bodies include inflatable bladders, sponges, and the like.

[0082] The support pillows may also have a variety of shapes and sizes. For example, the support pillow may have a horseshoe shape, a "U" shape, a "Π" shape, straight, semi-circular and the like. Shapes for such pillows are also described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,261,134; 5,661,861; 6,038,720; 6,055,687; 6,119,873; and 5,546,620, previously incorporated by

reference. Such support pillows may include a variety of decorations. For example, such pillows may include a fabric shell having a certain color or pattern.

[0083] The covers of the invention are generally flexible and are used to cover the support pillow. The covers may closely or generally conform to the shape of the pillow so that the pillow maintains the same overall appearance. Examples of materials that may be used to construct the cover include fabrics, such as cotton, polyester, nylon and the like, plastics, stretchable materials, such as a mesh fabric, Lycra, and the like. The covers may include one or more openings through which the support pillows are inserted. Conveniently, one or more fasteners may be used to close the opening after the pillow has been inserted. Examples of fasteners that may be used include zippers, a hook and loop fastener material (also known as VELCRO), snaps, buttons, hooks, laces, elastomers, flaps, buckles and the like. In some cases, the covers may include the features described in copending U.S. Application Nos. 09/679,139, filed October 3, 2000 and 09/802,097, filed March 8, 2001, the complete disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference.

[0084] The covers may have a wide variety of colors, textures, patterns, designs, thicknesses and the like. In this way, an existing support pillow may have its appearance or feel modified simply by placing a cover over the pillow. Also, in some cases, the cover may be reversible so that one cover may be displayed in two different ways. For example, the cover may be made of one type of fabric, but have sides with different colors, textures, patterns or the like. As another example, different fabrics for each side may be used. For instance, a woven fabric may be used on one side, while a wipeable fabric, such as a vinyl or nylon, may be used on the other side.

[0085] In some embodiments, the covers may also include various peripheral items that are attached to the covers. Such items can include, for example, toys, teething rings, educational items, pacifiers, play mats, play bars, electronic items such as sound chips, mirrors, writing surfaces, characters, body parts, such as heads, tails, arms legs, and the like, rattles, pockets and the like. Specific examples include three dimensional characters and/or objects, such as a puppy's head, with paws and tails on ends of the arms, a flower and leaves, a clown head with floppy feet and the like.

[0086] Optionally, various attachment mechanisms may be used to attach the peripheral items to the cover. Such attachment mechanisms can include, for example, straps, strings, a hook and loop fastener material, snaps, and the like. Another type of peripheral item is a handle for carrying the support pillow. One example of such a handle is described in U.S. Patent No. 6,434,770, the complete disclosure of which is herein incorporated by reference.

By using such peripheral items, the utility of the pillow may be changed simply by using another cover having a different set of items.

[0087] Other features of the cover include various pockets, such as external and internal pockets. These may be used to hold items such as bottles, cloths, accessories, aromatherapy packs, sound or vibration units, padding and the like. Also various appliqués may be used. These include decorations or trimming that is made of a material that is attached by sewing, gluing, or the like to another material. Materials that may be used include velvets and tactile, such as textured rubber. Further, the appliqué may represent an object, such as a flower, animal or the like and may depict a cluster or a scene. Other examples include crinkle materials, squeaking devices, pressure sensitive sound chips, gels, and the like. These may be placed between the surface and the material of the appliqué.

[0088] Another feature is one or more ties that may be provided at the ends of the arms to tie the arms together. In this way, the ties may be used to hold a small infant in place. Also a harness, straps or the like may also be used to hold the baby in place. In some cases, a pattern may be provided to permit the consumer to make their own cover. The pattern may define a top piece and a bottom piece that may be sewn together to form the cover. Also, kits may be provided to include an embroidery pattern, a paint-by-number design using fabric paints, and the like.

[0089] Some covers may be constructed of a disposable material, such as a mesh, light cloth or the like. In this way, the cover may be discarded when soiled. The covers may also include features such as a chalkboard or other writing surface that can be drawn on with chalk or markers, a blanket, a bladder or other padding that may be used to raise the height of the pillow or provide different and/or additional layers of padding, and the like.

[0090] Referring now to Fig. 1, one embodiment of a support pillow 10 that is covered by a cover 12 will be described. Pillow 10 may be constructed in a manner similar to those described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,261,134; 5,661,861; 6,038,720; 6,055,687; 6,119,873; 6,279,185 and 5,546,620, and copending U.S. Application No. _____, filed January 29, 2004 (Attorney Docket No. 17242-011500US) incorporated herein by reference. However, the invention is not limited to only this type of support pillow. For example, covers could also be provided for pillows similar to those described in copending U.S. Application Nos. 10/4226,067, filed 4/28/03, 10/612,266, filed 7/1/03, 10/612,267, filed 7/1/03, and 10/627,542, filed 7/25/03, the complete disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference.

[0091] Pillow 10 has a medial region 14 and two opposing arms 16 and 18 that terminate in ends 20 and 22. Pillow 10 further includes an outer periphery 24 and inner periphery 26 that defines a generally open well 28. As shown, outer periphery 24 and inner periphery 26 have a curved geometry and ends 20 and 22 are generally rounded.

5 [0092] Fig. 2 is a cross sectional view of pillow 10 and cover 12 taken along one of the arms. Pillow 10 is constructed of a shell 30 that is filled or stuffed with a fill material 32, such as hypo allergenic fiber fill material. Shell 30 is filled with enough fill material 32 so that pillow 10 is firm and does not droop or sag during handling. Shell 30 completely encloses fill material 32 so as to prevent its removal.

10 [0093] Cover 12 closely conforms to the shape of pillow 10 so that pillow 10 maintains the same overall shape and appearance as shown. Cover 12 further includes a zipper 34 that may be unzipped to form an opening through which pillow 10 is inserted. Because of the tight fit, cover 12 may be manipulated until it properly covers pillow 10. Zipper 34 may then be zipped to close the opening. As previously described, cover 12 may have a wide variety of
15 colors, textures and the like to vary the appearance or feel of pillow 10.

[0094] Cover 12 may be modified to vary the location of zipper 34 (or other fastener). Examples of such variation are illustrated in Figs. 3-8. For convenience of discussion, the covers in these examples (as well as other examples described herein) will use the same reference numerals used to describe cover 12, followed by a certain letter. Shown in Fig. 3 is
20 cover 12a having a zipper 34a that extends across the top side of medial region 14a.

[0095] Fig. 4 illustrates a cover 12b having a zipper 34b that extends along outer periphery 24b at medial region 14b. Fig. 5 illustrates a cover 12c having a zipper 34c that extends along inner periphery 26c at medial region 14c. Fig. 6 illustrates a cover 12d having a zipper 34d that extends along end 20d of arm 16d. Fig. 7 illustrates a cover 12e having a zipper 34e
25 that extends across the top side of arm 16e. Finally, Fig. 8 illustrates a pillow 12f having a zipper 34f that extends along arm 16f at outer periphery 24f.

[0096] Another embodiment of a cover 12g is illustrated in Figs. 9A and 9B. Cover 12g is similar to cover 12e of Fig. 7 except that end 20e has been removed to leave an opening 40 in arm 16g. As shown in Fig. 9B, an end flap 42 is placed over opening 40 to completely
30 enclose the support pillow after the pillow has been inserted through opening 40. A hook and loop fastener material may be used to hold flap 42 to arm 16g.

[0097] Fig. 10 illustrates another modification of support pillow 10 and cover 12 of Fig. 1. For convenience of discussion, similar elements of the support pillow of Fig. 10 and cover will use the same reference numerals, followed by the letter "h". Cover 12h has a pair of

attachment straps 44 and 46 that are sewn to the seam of outer periphery 24h. Straps 44 and 46 include pieces 48 and 50 of a hook and loop fastener material to form loops in straps 44 and 46, it being appreciated that other fasteners may be used. Straps 44 and 46 are used to attach various toys, such as a toy 52, to cover 12h. In this way, the utility of pillow 10h may be changed simply by attaching different items to the straps. Moreover, other attachment items may be used with the pillow simply by using another cover.

[0098] By way of example, Fig. 11 illustrates another embodiment of a cover 12i having an animal head 54 attached to end 18i. Further, it will be appreciated that other types of figures may be coupled to cover 12i and at different locations.

[0099] Fig. 12 illustrates one embodiment of a cover 12j covering a pillow. Cover 12j has a seam 60 on medial region 14j that defines an opening in cover 12j. Incorporated into seam 60 is a zipper 34j (shown in dashed line). Seam 60 covers zipper 34j so that the top surface of cover 12j is generally smooth. To access zipper 34j, seam 60 may be folded back. By providing seam 60 on the face of medial region 14j, a large opening may be provided to facilitate the introduction and removal of the pillow.

[0100] Fig. 13 illustrates a cover 12k where a zipper 34k is incorporated into a seam 62 at the outer periphery 24k of medial region 14k. At seam 62, two pieces of material that are joined together to form cover 12k. Zipper 34k may be operated to provide an opening into the interior of cover 12k.

[0101] Fig. 14 illustrates a cover 12l where a zipper 34l is incorporated into a seam 64 at the end of arm 18l, it being appreciated that zipper 34l may also be incorporated into end 16l. Zipper 34l may be operated to provide an opening into cover 12l at the end of one of the arms to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0102] Fig. 15 illustrates a cover 12m having a zipper 34m that is incorporated into a seam 66 at the inner periphery 26m of medial region 14m. By operating zipper 34m, an opening is formed into cover 12m to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0103] Fig. 16 illustrates one embodiment of a cover 12n covering a pillow. Cover 12n has a seam 68 on medial region 14n that defines an opening in cover 12n. Coupled to each edge of seam 68 are a plurality of ties 70. By providing seam 66 on the face of medial region 14n, a large opening may be provided to facilitate the introduction and removal of the pillow. To provide the opening at seam 68, ties 70 may be untied from each other and seam 68 pulled apart. Once the pillow is in place, ties 70 may be retied. Ties 70 may be constructed from essentially any type of flexible material, such as fabrics, strings and the like.

[0104] Fig. 17 illustrates a cover 12o where ties 74 are coupled to each edge of a seam 72 at the outer periphery 24o of medial region 14o. At seam 72, two pieces of material that are joined together to form cover 12o. Ties 74 may be untied to provide an opening into the interior of cover 12o.

5 [0105] Fig. 18 illustrates a cover 12p where ties 78 are coupled to each edge of a seam 76 at the end of arms 16p and 18p, it being appreciated that ties 78 may also be incorporated into only one of the ends. Ties 78 may be operated to provide an opening into cover 12p at the end of one of the arms to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

10 [0106] Fig. 19 illustrates a cover 12q having ties 82 that are copied to each edge of a seam 80 at the inner periphery 26q of medial region 14q. By untying ties 82, an opening is formed into cover 12q to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0107] Fig. 20 illustrates one embodiment of a cover 12r covering a pillow. Cover 12r has a seam 84 on medial region 14r that defines an opening in cover 12r. Coupled to one edge (such as the bottom edge) of seam 84 are a plurality of buttons 86. The other edge (such as the top edge) includes slits through which buttons 86 pass. By providing seam 84 on the face of medial region 14r, a large opening may be provided to facilitate the introduction and removal of the pillow. To provide the opening at seam 84, buttons 86 may be removed from their button holes and seam 84 pulled apart. Once the pillow is in place, buttons 86 may be inserted back through the button holes. Buttons 86 may be constructed from materials such as metal, plastic and the like.

[0108] Fig. 21 illustrates a cover 12s where buttons 90 are coupled to one edge of a seam 88 at the outer periphery 24s of medial region 14s. At seam 88, two pieces of material that are joined together to form cover 12s. Buttons 90 may be unbuttoned to provide an opening into the interior of cover 12s.

25 [0109] Fig. 22 illustrates a cover 12t where buttons 94 are coupled to one edge of a seam 92 at the end of one or both arms 16t and 18t. Buttons 94 may be operated to provide an opening into cover 12t at the end of one of the arms to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0110] Fig. 23 illustrates a cover 12u having buttons 98 that are coupled to one edge of a seam 96 at the inner periphery 26u of medial region 14u. By unbuttoning snaps 98, an opening is formed into cover 12u to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

30 [0111] Fig. 24 illustrates one embodiment of a cover 12v covering a pillow. Cover 12v has a seam 100 on medial region 14v that defines an opening in cover 12v. Coupled to each edge of seam 100 are a plurality of buckles 102. One piece of each buckle is coupled to one inside

edge while the other piece of the buckle is attached to the opposing edge of seam 100.

Examples of buckles that may be used include traditional belt buckles, quick release buckles and the like. These may be coupled to the edges of the seam using ties, straps, or the like.

For instance, materials such as leather, fabric or nylon straps, strings, ropes and the like may be used to couple the buckles to the cover. By providing seam 100 on the face of medial region 14v, a large opening may be provided to facilitate the introduction and removal of the pillow. To provide the opening at seam 100, buckles 102 may be unsnapped from each other and seam 100 pulled apart. Once the pillow is in place, buckles 102 may be connected.

[0112] Fig. 25 illustrates a cover 12w where buckles 106 are coupled to each edge of a seam 104 at the outer periphery 24w of medial region 14w. At seam 104, two pieces of material that are joined together to form cover 12w. Buckles 106 may be unbuckled to provide an opening into the interior of cover 12w.

[0113] Fig. 26 illustrates a cover 12x where buckles 110 are coupled to each edge of a seam 108 at the end of one or both arms 16x and 18x. Buckles 110 may be operated to provide an opening into cover 12x at the end of one of the arms to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0114] Fig. 27 illustrates a cover 12y having buckles 114 that are coupled to each edge of a seam 112 at the inner periphery 26y of medial region 14y. By unbuckling buckles 114, an opening is formed into cover 12y to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0115] Fig. 28 illustrates one embodiment of a cover 12z covering a pillow. Cover 12z has an overlapping seam 116 on medial region 14z that forms a flap and defines an opening in cover 12z. For example, the flap may overlap about 1 to about 3 inches. Because the edges of the seam overlap, a natural flap is provided to close the opening. To gain access to the interior, the flap may be lifted to expose the opening. Optionally, coupled to each edge of seam 116 may be a hook and loop fastener material 118 (shown in phantom line). One piece of the hook and loop mater may be coupled to one inside edge while the other piece may be attached to the opposing edge of seam 116. By providing seam 116 on the face of medial region 14z, a large opening may be provided to facilitate the introduction and removal of the pillow. Once the pillow is in place in the interior, the flap may be smoothed over cover 12z, optionally being joined by the hook and loop fastener material.

[0116] Fig. 29 illustrates a cover 12aa having an overlapping seam 120 that forms a flap at the outer periphery 24aa of medial region 14aa. At seam 120, two pieces of material that are joined together to form cover 12aa. Optionally, a hook and loop fastener material 112 may be coupled to the underside of the flap and to the opposite edge of seam 120 is securely hold the

flap to the cover. Seam 120 may be separated to provide an opening into the interior of cover 12aa.

[0117] Fig. 30 illustrates a cover 12bb where an overlapping seam 124 is positioned at the end of one or both arms 16bb and 18bb. Seam 124 may be separated to provide an opening into cover 12bb at the end of one of the arms to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed. Optionally, a hook and loop fastener material 126 may be coupled to the underside of the flap and the opposite side of the seam to securely couple the flap to the cover.

[0118] Fig. 31 illustrates a cover 12cc having an overlapping seam 130 at the inner periphery 26cc of medial region 14cc. By separating seam 130, an opening is formed into cover 12cc to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed. Optionally, a hook and loop fastener material 132 may be used to hold the flap closed.

[0119] Fig. 32 illustrates one embodiment of a cover 12dd covering a pillow. Cover 12dd has a seam 134 on medial region 14dd that defines an opening in cover 12dd. Coupled to each edge of seam 134 are a plurality of snaps 136. The male part of each snap is coupled to one inside edge while the female part of the snap is attached to the opposing edge of seam 134. By providing seam 134 on the face of medial region 14dd, a large opening may be provided to facilitate the introduction and removal of the pillow. To provide the opening at seam 134, snaps 136 may be unsnapped from each other and seam 134 pulled apart. Once the pillow is in place, snaps 136 may be snapped. Snaps 136 may be constructed from materials such as metal, plastic and the like.

[0120] Fig. 33 illustrates a cover 12ee where snaps 140 are coupled to each edge of a seam 138 at the outer periphery 24ee of medial region 14ee. At seam 138, two pieces of material that are joined together to form cover 12ee. Snaps 140 may be unsnapped to provide an opening into the interior of cover 12ee.

[0121] Fig. 34 illustrates a cover 12ff where snaps 144 are coupled to each edge of a seam 142 at the end of one or both arms 16ff and 18ff. Snaps 144 may be operated to provide an opening into cover 12ff at the end of one of the arms to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0122] Fig. 35 illustrates a cover 12gg having snaps 148 that are coupled to each edge of a seam 146 at the inner periphery 26gg of medial region 14gg. By unsnapping snaps 148, an opening is formed into cover 12gg to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0123] Fig. 36 illustrates one embodiment of a cover 12hh covering a pillow. Cover 12hh has a seam 150 on medial region 14hh that defines an opening in cover 12hh. Coupled to each edge of seam 150 are a plurality of hooks 152 that loop over catches on the opposite

edge of seam 150. By providing seam 150 on the face of medial region 14hh, a large opening may be provided to facilitate the introduction and removal of the pillow. To provide the opening at seam 150, hooks 152 may be unhooked from the catches and seam 150 pulled apart. Once the pillow is in place, hooks 152 may be re-hooked. Hooks 152 may be constructed from materials such as metal, plastic and the like.

[0124] Fig. 37 illustrates a cover 12ii where hooks 154 are coupled to one edge of a seam 156 at the outer periphery 24ii of medial region 14ii and mate with catches on the other edge of the seam. At seam 156, two pieces of material that are joined together to form cover 12ii. Hooks 154 may be un-hooked to provide an opening into the interior of cover 12ii.

[0125] Fig. 38 illustrates a cover 12jj where hooks 158 are coupled to an edge of a seam 160 at the end of one or both arms 16jj and 18jj. Hooks 158 may be unhooked to provide an opening into cover 12jj at the end of one of the arms to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0126] Fig. 39 illustrates a cover 12kk having hooks 162 that are coupled to each edge of a seam 164 at the inner periphery 26kk of medial region 14kk. By unhooking hooks 162 from their catches, an opening is formed into cover 12kk to permit the pillow to be inserted or removed.

[0127] Fig. 40 illustrates a cover 12ll that is constructed of a reversible fabric having two sides 166 and 168. In this way, cover 12ll may be turned inside out so that both surfaces may be used with a single pillow. As shown, cover 12ll includes a zipper 170. However, it will be appreciated that any of the fasteners described herein which are located at any of the positions may be used. As shown, cover 12ll is constructed of a single fabric with different patterns on each side. However, it will be appreciated that different fabrics or materials could be used on each side. In this way, the sides may be varied using different colors, textures, patterns, appliqués and the like. These include woven fabrics, wipeable fabrics (such as vinyl or nylon), and the like.

[0128] Figs. 41-44 illustrate embodiments where handles may be coupled to the cover. The handles may be provided in a variety of locations on the covers using a variety of techniques, including those described in U.S. Patent No. 6,434,770, incorporated herein by reference.

Also, a variety of materials may be used to form the handles, such as ropes, nylon straps, fabrics, plastics, and the like. Attachment schemes may be used include sewing, rivets, snaps, tied ends, gluing and the like.

[0129] In Fig. 41, a cover 12mm is shown with a handle 172 that is coupled to a seam 174 at the outer periphery of medial region 14mm. Handle 172 may have essentially any length, from the size of a hand to along the arms of cover 12mm.

[0130] Fig. 42 illustrates a cover 12nn having a handle 176 that is sewn to the outer periphery of arm 16nn. As shown, handle 176 is a piece of nylon webbing. Handle 176 may be positioned anywhere on arm 16nn, or may also be positioned on arm 18nn.

[0131] Fig. 43 illustrates a cover 12oo having a handle 178 that extends diagonally across the outer periphery 24oo of medial region 14oo. Handle 178 may be a strip of fabric or any of the handles described herein.

[0132] Fig. 44 illustrates a cover 12pp having handle 180 that is similar to handle 176 of Fig. 42 except that handle 180 is sewn directly into a seam 182 that joins two pieces of material that form cover 12pp.

[0133] In some embodiments, the covers may be provided with various pockets. These may be provided essentially anywhere on the cover. As one example, Fig. 45 illustrates a cover 12qq having a set of pockets 184 along the outer perimeter 24qq. These may be only at medial region 14qq or may extend along arms 16qq and 18qq. The pockets 184 have an open top end 186 into which items may be placed. Optionally, one or more fasteners may be used to close the pockets. Further, the pockets may be expandable or stretchable to increase the holding capacity. Examples of items that may be held include toys, wipes, diapers, bottles, burp cloths, pacifiers, accessories and the like. Optionally an attachment 188 may be provided to permit items to be attached to cover 12qq.

[0134] Fig. 46 illustrates a cover 12rr having an opening 190 providing access to a set of internal pockets 192 that are on a generally flat surface of the pillow. These pockets may be at medial region 14rr, as well as along arms 16rr and 18rr and may be formed using a piece of fabric that is coupled to the inside of cover 12rr. Examples of items that may be held in pockets 192 include aromatherapy packs, sound or vibration units, therapeutic magnets, padding and the like.

[0135] Fig. 47 illustrates a cover 12ss having pockets 194 along the outer perimeter 24ss. Pockets 194 have ties 196 that may be tied together to close the pockets. Also, other fasteners may be used as described herein.

[0136] Fig. 48 illustrates a cover 12tt having a set of internal pockets 198 for holding items similar to that described in Fig. 46. Although shown with three spaced apart pockets, it will be appreciated that other numbers and spacing may be used.

[0137] Fig. 49 illustrates a cover 12uu having several attachments 200 for attaching various items to cover 12uu. Attachments 200 comprise loops that are sewn into a seam 202 in cover 12uu. A variety of items may be coupled to the loops, such as plastic links 204 that are connected to toys 206. This permits toys or other items to be coupled to a pillow by covering the pillow with cover 12uu. In this way, a preexisting pillow does not need to be modified to have toys attached. One example of a pillow having attachments is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,546,620, incorporated herein by reference. With cover 12uu, such attachments do not need to be made directly on the pillow, thereby making the pillow more versatile in its uses. Also, it will be appreciated that other attachments may be used including clips, hooks, straps and the like.

[0138] Fig. 50 illustrates a cover 12vv covering a pillow. Cover 12vv may include an opening and a fastener similar to other embodiments. Cover 12vv includes attachments 208 for holding a set of bars 210 above the pillow. Such bars are described in copending U.S. Application Nos. 09/679,139, filed October 3, 2000 and 09/802,097, filed March 8, 2001, incorporated herein by reference, and may be used to hang items above the pillow. However, with cover 12vv, bars 210 may be coupled to the pillow without directly modifying a pillow. In this way, existing pillows may be retrofit to have bars by simply adding cover 12vv. As shown, attachments 208 comprise pockets. However, it will be appreciated that other attachments may be used as well. For example, as shown in Fig. 51, loops 212 connected to clips 214 may be used to connect bars 210 to cover 12xx. Also, bars 210 may also include attachments 216 that permit items to hang from bars 210. Other attachments that may be used to couple the bars to the cover include ties, straps, ropes and the like.

[0139] Various appliqués may also be added to any of the covers described herein. Some examples of such appliqués are illustrated in Figs. 52-55. These covers may have openings and fasteners similar to the other covers described herein. In Fig. 52, a cover 12yy has a set of objects 226. These may be sewed, glued, painted or the like to cover 12yy. As shown, objects 226 are single objects that are separated from each other. However, they could be combined in a scene or connected together.

[0140] In Fig. 53, a cover 12zz has a set of objects 228, 230 and 232. Object 228 may comprise a crinkle material that crinkles when played with by a baby. Object 230 may be constructed of materials with different textures, such as on each pedal of the flower. Object 232 may be configured to squeak when pressure is applied.

[0141] Fig. 54 illustrates a cover 12ab with a set of connected objects 234 that are similar to cover 12yy, but are interconnected.

[0142] Fig. 55 illustrates a cover 12ac having a variety of objects with various features. These objects may be covered with a material or otherwise attached to the cover 12ac. Object 236 comprises a gel pack that may be pressed to give a “squishy” feel. Object 238 comprises a pressure sensitive sound chip that produces a sound or music when pressed.

5 Object 240 comprises an appliqué that squeaks when pressed. Object 242 comprises a material that crinkles when touched.

[0143] Fig. 56 illustrates a cover 12ad having a clown head 244. Cover 12ad may include an opening and a fastener to close the opening similar to the other covers described herein. Although shown with a clown head, other items may be used as well, including other

10 characters, body parts, and essentially any other types of object.

[0144] Fig. 57 illustrates a cover 12ae in the shape of a lion, including a head 246 and feet 248. Other objects may be used as well. For instance, the cover could include a puppy head and paws and tails on ends of the arms, flower petals and leaves, and the like. Other examples of characters are described in U.S. Patent No. 6,055,687, incorporated herein by

15 reference.

[0145] One advantage of using covers 12ad and 12ae is that a cover may be used to convert a conventional pillow to have a character or other item. This increases the versatility of a conventional pillow.

[0146] Fig. 58 illustrates a cover 12af that may be particularly useful with a newborn or a

20 small infant. Cover 12af may be placed over a pillow using any of the techniques described herein. Cover 12af also includes a pair of ties 250 that are affixed to each end 16af and 18af. For example, ties 250 could be sewn into a center seam 252 of cover 12af. Ties 250 may each have a length of about 4 inches to about 10 inches, and more typically from about 6 to about 7 inches. Materials that may be used for ties 250 include fabric strips, webbing, rope,

25 string, leather straps and the like. In use, ties 250 are crossed and pulled together to pull arms 16af and 18af together. In so doing, the small infant is better held within the well created by the pillow. Optionally, ties 250 may be tied in the shape of a bow, or may use some other type of knot. As another alternative, various connectors or fasteners may be used to keep the arms close to each other. For example, the arms could be pulled together and then held in

30 place using a buckle (such as on a backpack strap), or cinched together using a grip buckle. Other possible buckles or fasteners include press buckles, twist locks, slip locks, tuck buckles, cord locks, a hook and loop fastener material and the like.

[0147] Fig. 59 illustrates a cover 12ag having a harness 254. Harness 254 has a holding region 256 onto which the infant is rested and extends over the well region. For example, the

infant could be placed in a supine position on holding region 256, with the harness 254 holding the infant off the ground. A variety of techniques may be used to couple harness 254 to cover 12ag. For example, harness 254 could be permanently attached to cover 12ag, or could be removable (in which case harness 254 could be placed directly onto a pillow that does not have a cover). As shown, harness 254 includes a set of straps 258 that are coupled to holding region 256. Straps 258 could be sewn or glued to cover 12ag, or simply looped around arms 16ag and 18ag and/or medial region 14ag. Further, instead of using straps, other materials could be used, such as a webbing material, a wide piece of fabric or the like. In some cases, holding region 256 could be directly coupled to cover 12ag, such as by sewing.

[0148] Fig. 60 illustrates a cover 12ah that may be placed over a pillow using any of the techniques described herein. Attached to cover 12ah is a blanket 260 that may be used to permit a child to lay on the floor, similar to that described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,546,620 and 6,523,200, incorporated herein by reference. As shown, cover 260 is sewed into a seam 262; however, it will be appreciated that other techniques may be used, such as by gluing, buttons, snaps, and the like. Also, in some cases, blanket 260 may be removable from cover 12ah. By using cover 12ah, a pillow may be converted to have a blanket, simply by placing cover 12ah over the pillow. Blanket 260 may extend anywhere along outer periphery 24ah, and may have a length sufficient to hold a baby. For example, the length could be from about 18 inches to about 3 feet.

[0149] Fig. 61 illustrates a cover 12ai that may be attached to a pillow using any of the techniques described herein. In one particular arrangement, cover 12ai may have an opening 262 where the pillow may be inserted. Opening 262 also permits a padding layer 264 (having the same general shape as the pillow) to be inserted between the pillow and cover 12ai. In some cases, a pocket may be coupled to cover 12ai to hold padding layer 264 in position.

[0150] Padding layer 264 may be used to raise the height of the pillow, give it a slightly different shape or simply provide a different type of padding. For example, padding layer 264 may comprise one or more layers of polyurethane foam, foam rubber, a visco-elastic material, or the like and may have a height in the range from about ½ inch to about 5 inches. In some cases, the surface of padding layer 264 could be angled or contoured to alter the shape of the pillow. In other cases, padding layer 264 may be constructed of a relatively dense or stiff material to increase the firmness of the pillow. Also, padding layers of different sizes may be used to adjust the shape of the pillow.

[0151] Figs. 62 and 63 illustrate a cover 12aj that may be placed over a pillow 268 using any of the techniques described herein. Cover 12aj includes an optional interior pocket 270 for

holding an inflatable bladder 272. Alternatively, bladder 272 could be placed directly between the shell 274 that encompasses the fill material 276 of pillow 266 and cover 12aj. Also, cover 12aj may include an opening similar to cover 12ai for inserting and removing bladder 272. When inflated, bladder 272 expands as illustrated by the arrows. Bladder 272 may be inflated with air, a liquid, or the like and may be inflated to different pressures to adjust the firmness and or shape of the pillow. Further multiple bladders of different sizes and shapes may be used.

[0152] Fig. 64 illustrates another embodiment of a cover 12ak that may be placed over a pillow 280. Cover 12ak has two ends, 16ak and 18ak, one or both of which may have an open end. At the open end is a reversible pocket 282 (such as at end 16ak). Pocket 282 is sewn (or otherwise affixed) to sides 284 of cover 12ak in a reversed orientation. By having end 16ak open, pillow 280 may be inserted into cover 12ak through the open end. To close cover 12ak, pocket 282 is reversed to the position illustrated in Figs. 65 and 66 where it is folded over the end of the pillow to enclose the pillow. In this way, pocket 282 operates somewhat similar to a traditional sandwich bag. To remove pillow 280, pocket 282 is simply reversed back to the position illustrated in Fig. 64 and pillow 280 is pulled through the open end.

[0153] The invention has now been described in detail for purposes of clarity and understanding. However, it will be appreciated that certain changes and modification may be practiced within the scope of the appended claims.